

INFORMATION LITERACY IN THE 21ST CENTURY: USEFULNESS AND EASE OF LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

This study of teachers in training in UAE addresses Information Literacy skills including ease of learning, usefulness and instructional preferences. Most teachers in training found that IL skills are both useful and ease to learn. Multiple instructional strategies were preferred by the teachers in training. The study also shows that although most teachers in training found IL skills easy to learn there are areas such as online safety and privacy that they want to learn more about.

KEYWORDS

Information literacy, Online environments, Teaching strategies, Teacher training

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Schubert et al (2013) a way to explore and improve pedagogies is by measuring and assessing the Information Literacy skills (IL) that students are taught. In a technology-based environment, IL skills are becoming essential, not only as a part of formal learning but also as part of lifelong learning. According to Partnership for 21st Century (2009) the knowledge, skills and expertise the 21st century student must master are: knowledge in key subjects (such as English, reading or language arts, world languages, arts, mathematics, economics, science, geography, history and government and civics), think and work creatively with others, being able to think critically and solve problems, communicate and collaborate, have life and career skills and finally have information, media and technology skills. Twenty-first century schools have to take into consideration the requirements expected by educational agencies, society and the labor market (Raish & Rimland, 2016; Thonney, & Montgomery, 2015).

The purpose of our research was to assess the usefulness and ease of learning Information Literacy (IL) skills, from the view point of teachers in training. We also wanted to assess what are the preferred methods for learning and developing IL skills and what other IL skills they would like to learn. It is very important that K-12 teachers in training learn IL skills as well as understand its importance for their future career. This study will allow further knowledge about how to provide IL skills training as well as it will allow college programs to adapt and evolve their curriculum for the challenges that future teachers have to face in the 21st century.

2. METHODS

This research was conducted at the completion of the undergraduate course titled Information Literacy offered for 15 weeks in the fall semester of 2016 at a teacher education college in the UAE. Thirty one students were enrolled in two separate sections of this course. The course is designed to provide students with the opportunity to become information literate by using Information and Communication Technology (ICT). IL skills taught included using the school's portal, email and learning management system, digital ethics, online privacy and security, searching for information online, podcasting, screencasting, editing video and audio, evaluating sources and resources of information and using technology to present information. The

teaching strategies used during the course were: teacher demonstration, video demonstration, colleague's instruction, in class practice and teacher support during in class practice.

Twenty one of the 31 students responded to the survey. To collect data we used a survey developed specifically for this study that contained open and closed questions and was completed online by students. The survey included 11 items about students' opinions regarding the usefulness and the ease of learning information literacy skills and demographics. Descriptive statistics of the closed questions of the survey are presented in graphic format and provide summaries of the items. Qualitative content analysis of the open questions of the survey were also performed.

The research questions for this study were:

1. What is the opinion of teachers in training regarding the usefulness and the ease of learning information literacy skills?
2. What are the teachers in training preferred methods for learning and developing information literacy skills?
3. What other information literacy skills would teachers in training like to learn more about?

2.1 Results and Discussion

Most of the students found the IL skills easy to learn and/ or moderately easy. Just a few found it difficult. The relative ease of learning the IL skills may be attributed to several factors. Teachers in training may have been introduced to these skills previously. Another factor may be that this generation of students feels more comfortable with technology.

The data also shows the skills taught in the course were perceived as useful or very useful by the teachers in training. This response may be due to their understanding of what technology skills primary school teachers need to know. In addition, these teachers in training are aware that numerous aspects of their lives involve technology and having technology skills can help them in many areas.

The participants in this study indicated that multiple learning strategies were beneficial. Classroom instruction and in class practice were cited a little more often, than video demonstration and peer instruction. However the number of responses for each learning strategy was similar which may indicate that the use of many teaching strategies by the instructors is advantageous. The reason for this may be that the skills taught are varied and that this requires multiple ways to teach. Some skills may be better taught, for example, through demonstration and others by in class practice.

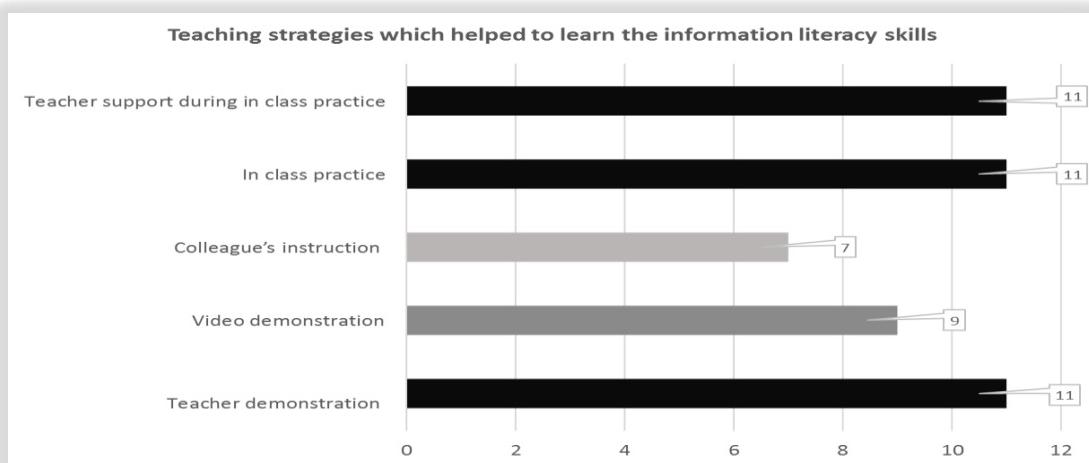


Figure 1. Student preferences regarding teaching strategies

The participants were also asked what additional IL skills they would like to learn. The skill with most responses was related to how to protect themselves and their data in online environments.

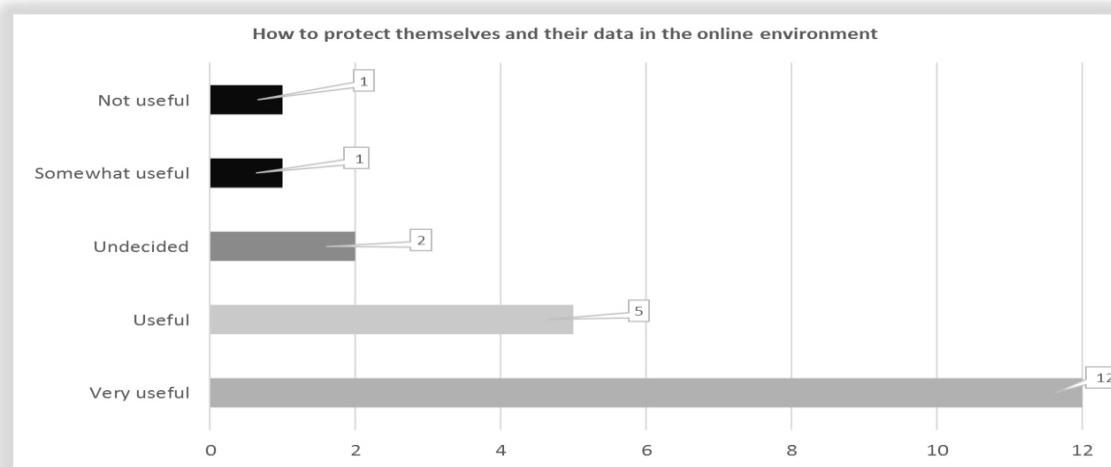


Figure 2. Student preferences regarding online safety

These skills that were taught include online behaviors as well as measures to protect their data and devices. Both of these aspects, that often are connected, might make them feel that these are valuable skills and greater understanding is better. They might also be aware that new dangers to their privacy are being deployed and they need ongoing defenses. Furthermore, personal privacy is important and though they learned some ways to be protected, the participants may be particularly sensitive to this issue. Thus they feel the need to learn additional skills to protect themselves and their data.

3. CONCLUSION

The literature indicates that IL skills are found generally useful for diverse purposes (personal and work related). Our study shows that most teachers in training find IL skills easy to learn. Using multiple teaching strategies (in particular classroom instruction) seems beneficial as it addresses the diverse nature of the information resources and learner needs. Thus good classroom instruction may also account for the general ease of learning IL skills. Despite the fact that the current generation of students feel more comfortable using technology there are still some areas, such as safety and privacy, where more knowledge and experience is desirable.

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